DARK HOLLOW

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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CHAPTER I.

The House of Mystery.

A high and narrow gate of carefully joined boards, standing ajar in a fence of the same construction! What is there in this to rouse a whole neighborhood and collect before it a group of eager, anxious, hesitating people?

This is Judge Ostrander's place, and anyone who knows Shelby or the gossip of its suburbs knows that this house of his has not opened its doors to any outsider, man or woman, for over a dozen years; nor have his gates been seen in all that time to gape at anyone's instance or to stand unclosed to public intrusion. The seclusion sought was absolute. The men and women who passed and repassed this corner many times a day were as ignorant as the townspeople in general of what lay behind the gray, monotonous exterior of the weatherbeaten boards they so frequently brushed against. The house was there, of course—they all knew the house, or did once—but there were rumors of another fence, a second barrier, standing a few feet inside the first and similar to it in all respects, even to the gates which corresponded exactly with these outer and visible ones and probably were just as fully provided with bolts and bars.

And now! in the freshness of this summer morning, without warning or any seeming reason for the change, the strict habit of years has been broken into and this gate of gates is not only standing unlocked before their eyes, but a woman—a stranger to the town as her very act shows—has been seen to enter there!—to enter, but not come out; which means that she must still be inside, and possibly in the very presence of the judge.

Where is Bela? Why does he allow his errands—But it was Bela, or so they have been told, who left this gate ajar . . . he, the awe and terror of the town, the enormous, redoubtable, close-mouthed negro, trusted as man is seldom trusted, and faithful to his trust, yes, up to this very hour, as all must acknowledge, in spite of every temptation (and they had been many and alluring) to disclose the secret of this home of which he was not the least interesting factor. What has made him thus suddenly careless, he who has never been careless before? Money? A bribe from the woman who had entered there?

What else was there to believe? There stood the gate with the pebble holding it away from the post; and here stood half the neighborhood, in a fascination which had for its motif the knowledge that they, themselves if they had courage enough, might go in, just as this woman had gone in, and see—why, what she is seeing now—the unknown, unguessed reason for all these mysteries—the hidden treasure or the hidden sorrow which would explain why he, their first citizen, the respected, even revered judge of their highest court, should make use of such precautions and show such unvarying determination to bar out all comers from the place he called his home.

It had not always been so. Within the memory of many there it had been an abode of cheer and good fellowship. Not a few of the men and women now hesitating before its portals could boast of meals taken at the judge's ample board, and of evenings spent in animated conversation in the great room where he kept his books and did his writing.

But that was before his son left him in so unaccountable a manner; before—yes, all were agreed on this point—before that other bitter ordeal of his middle age, the trial and condemnation of the man who had waylaid and murdered his best friend.

Though the effect of these combined sorrows had not seemed to be immediate (one month had seen both); though a half-year had elapsed before all sociability was lost in extreme self absorption, and a full one before he took down the picket fence which had hitherto been considered a sufficient protection to his simple grounds, and put up these boards which had so completely isolated him from the rest of the world, it was evident enough to the friends who recalled his look and step as he walked the streets with Algernon Etheridge on one side and his brilliant, ever-successful son on the other, that the change now observable in him was due to the violent sundering of these two ties. Grief slowly settled into confirmed melancholy, and melancholy into eccentricities.

Judge Ostrander was a recluse of the most uncompromising type; but he was such for only half his time. From ten in the morning till five in the afternoon, he came and went like any other citizen, fulfilling his judicial duties with the same scrupulous care as formerly and with more affability. Indeed, he showed at times, and often when it was least expected, a mellowness of temper quite foreign to him in his early days. The admiration awakened by his fine appearance on the bench was never marred now by those quick and rasping tones of an easily disturbed temper which had given edge to his invective when he stood as pleader in the very court where he now presided as judge. But away from the bench, once quit of the courthouse and the town, the man who attempted to accost him on his way to his carriage or sought to waylay him at his own gate had need of all his courage to sustain the rebuff his presumption incurred.

The son, a man of great ability who was making his way as a journalist in another city, had no explanation to give of his father's peculiarities. Though he never came to Shelby—the rupture between the two, if rupture it were, seeming to be complete—there were many who had visited him in his own place of business and put such questions concerning the judge and his eccentric manner of living as must have provoked response had the young man had any response to give. But he appeared to have none. Either he was as ignorant as themselves of the causes which had led to his father's habit of extreme isolation, or he showed powers of dissimulation hardly in accordance with the other traits of his admirable character.

All of which closed inquiry in this direction, but left the maw of curiosity unsatisfied.

And unsatisfied it had remained up to this hour, when through accident—or was it treachery—the barrier to knowledge was down and the question of years seemed at last upon the point of being answered.

Meantime a fussy, talkative man was endeavoring to impress the rapidly collecting crowd with the advisability of their entering all together and approaching the judge in a body.

"We can say that we felt it to be our dooty to follow this woman in," he argued. "Didn't you say she had a child with her, Miss Weeks?"

"Yes, and—"

"Tell us the whole story, Miss Weeks. Some of us haven't heard it. Then if it seems our duty as his neighbors and well wishers to go in, we'll just go in."

The little woman towards whom this appeal was directed immediately began her ingenuous tale. She was sitting in her front window sewing. Everybody knew that this window faced

They Burst Through the Second Gate.

the end of the lane in which they were then standing. She could see out without being very plainly seen herself; she had her eyes on this gate when Bela, prompt to the minute as he always was, issued forth on his morning walk to town for the day's supplies.

Always exact, always in a hurry—knowing as he did that the judge would not leave for court till his return—he had never, in all the eight years she had been sitting in that window making buttonholes, shown any hesitation in his methodical relocking of the gate and subsequent quick departure.

But this morning he had lingered in the gateway peering to right and left in a way so unlike himself that the moment he was out of sight she could not help running down the lane to see if her suspicions were correct. And they were. Not only had he left the gate unlocked, but he had done so purposely.

She had about decided that it was only proper for her to enter and make sure that all was right with the judge when she saw a woman looking at her from the road—a woman all in purple even to the veil which hid her features. A little child was with her, and the two must have stepped into the road from behind some of the bushes, as neither of them were anywhere in sight when she herself came running down from the corner.

It was enough to startle anyone, especially as the woman did not speak, but just stood silent and watching her through a veil the like of which was not to be found in Shelby, and which in itself was enough to rouse a decent woman's suspicions.

She was so amazed at this that she stepped back and attempted to address the stranger. But before she had got much further than a timid and hesitating "Madam," the woman, roused into action possibly by her interference, made a quick gesture suggestive of impatience if not rebuke, and moving resolutely towards the gate Miss Weeks had so indiscreetly left unguarded, pushed it open and disappeared within, dragging the little child after her.

"And she's in there still?"

"I haven't seen her come out."

"Then what's the matter with you?" called a burly, high-strung woman, stepping hastily from the group and laying her hand upon the gate still standing temptingly ajar. "It's no time for nonsense," she announced, as she pushed it open and stepped promptly in, followed by the motley group of men and women who, if they lacked courage to lead, certainly showed willingness to follow.

One glance and they felt their courage rewarded.

Rumor, which so often deceives, proved itself correct in this case. A second gate confronted them exactly like the first, even to the point of being held open by a pebble placed against the post. And a second fence, also! built upon the same pattern as the one they had just passed through; the two forming a double barrier as mysterious to contemplate in fact as it had ever been in fancy. In gazing at these fences and the canyonlike walk stretching between them the band of curious invaders forgot their prime errand for a moment.

But whatever the mysteries of the place, a greater one awaited them beyond, and presently realizing this, they burst with one accord through the second gate into the mass of greenery which, either from neglect or intention, masked this side of the Ostrander homestead.

Never before had they beheld so lawless a growth or a house so completely lost amid vines and shrubbery. Two solemn fir trees, which were all that remained of an old-time and famous group, kept guard over the untended lawn, adding their suggestion of age and brooding melancholy to the air of desolation infesting the whole place. One might be approaching a tomb, for all token that appeared of human presence. Even sound was lacking. It was like a painted scene—a dream of human extinction.

Instinctively the women faltered and the men drew back; then the very silence caused a sudden reaction, and with one simultaneous rush they made for the only entrance they saw and burst without further ceremony into the house.

A common hall and common furnishings confronted them. More they could not gather; for blocked as the doorway was by their crowding figures, the little light which sifted in over their heads was not enough to show up details. Halting with one accord in what seemed to be the middle of the uncarpeted floor, they waited for some indication of a clear passageway to the great room where the judge would undoubtedly be found in conversation with his strange guest.

The woman of the hard voice and self-satisfied demeanor who had started them upon this adventure was still ahead; but even she quailed when she found herself face to face with a heavy curtain instead of a yielding door.

"Look at this!" she whispered, pushing the curtain inward with a quick movement.

Sunshine! A stream of it, dazzling them almost to blindness and sending them, one and all, pellmell back upon each other! However dismal the approach, here all was in brilliant light with every evidence before them of busy life.

The room was not only filled, but crammed, with furniture. This was the first thing they noticed; then, as their blinking eyes became accustomed to the glare and to the unexpected confusion of tables and chairs and screens and standing receptacles for books and pamphlets and boxes labeled and padlocked, they beheld something else.

The judge was there, but in what a condition.

From the end of the forty-foot room his seated figure confronted them, silent, staring and unmoving. With clenched fingers gripping the arms of his great chair and head held forward, he looked like one frozen at the moment of doom, such the expression of features usually so noble, and now almost unrecognizable were it not for the snow white of his locks and his unmistakable brow.

Frozen! Not an eyelash quivered, nor was there any perceptible movement in his sturdy chest. His eyes were on their eyes, but he saw no one; and down upon his head and over his whole form the sunshine poured from a large window let into the ceiling directly above him, lighting up the strained and unnatural aspect of his remarkable countenance and bringing into sharp prominence the commonplace objects cluttering the table at his elbow.

Inarticulate murmurs swelled and ebbed, now louder, now more faintly as the crowd surged forward or drew back, appalled by that moveless, breathless, awe-compelling figure.

A breathless moment; then the horrified murmur rose here, there and everywhere: "He's dead! He's dead!" when quietly and convincingly a bluff masculine voice spoke from the doorway behind them:

"You needn't be frightened. In an hour or a half-hour he will be the same as ever. My aunt has such attacks. They call it catalepsy."

Imperceptibly the crowd dwindled; the most discreet among them quite content to leave the house; a few, and these the most thoughtful, devoted all their energies to a serious quest for the woman and child whom they continued to believe to be in hiding somewhere inside the walls she had so audaciously entered.

The small party decided to start their search by a hasty inspection of the front hall, when a shout and scramble in the passages beyond cut short their intent and held them panting and eager, each to his place.

Frightened, they drew their gaze from the rigid figure in the chair, and, with bated breaths and rapidly paling cheeks, listened to the distant murmur on the far-off road.

What was it? They could not guess, and it was with unbounded relief they pressed forward to greet the shadowy form of a young girl hurrying toward them from the rear, with news in her face. She spoke quickly.

"The woman is gone. Harry Doane saw her sliding out behind us just after we came in. She was hiding in some of the corners here and slipped out by the kitchen way when we were not looking. He has gone to see—"

Breathlessly Miss Weeks cut the girl's story short; breathlessly she rushed to the nearest window, and, helped by willing hands, succeeded in forcing it up and tearing a hole in the vines, through which they one and all looked out in eager excitement.

A motley throng of people were crowding in through the double gateway. Some one was in their grasp. It was Bela! Bela, the giant! Bela, the terror of the town, no longer a terror but a struggling, half-fainting figure, fighting to free himself and get in advance, despite some awful hurt which blanched his coal-black features and made his great limbs falter, while still keeping his own and making his way, by sheer force of will, up the path and the two steps of entrance—his body alternately sinking back or plunging forward as those in the rear or those in front got the upper hand.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

What Sought Liberty.

Thrills are by no means out of date in the New Zealand of today, and a few weeks back the workers in a sawmill at Whangaparapara were given an exhibition of the vigor that lies in a thwarted whale. One of these monsters of the deep, many of whom are seen about the coasts of the Dominion, where whaling was once a very profitable industry, recently found its way up one of the small harbors, and finally got inside the booms where the logs are kept for the saw mills. It seemed happy enough there for a while, till it suddenly discovered itself in enclosed water, and then the fight began. It lashed round and round in blind fury, sending huge bauri logs tumbling about like walking sticks, and then cleared a passage and made off full speed ahead for the open sea. Unfortunately for itself, it drove head on against a pile, and the blow stunned it so that it was stranded on the beach.

Worth, the Dressmaker.

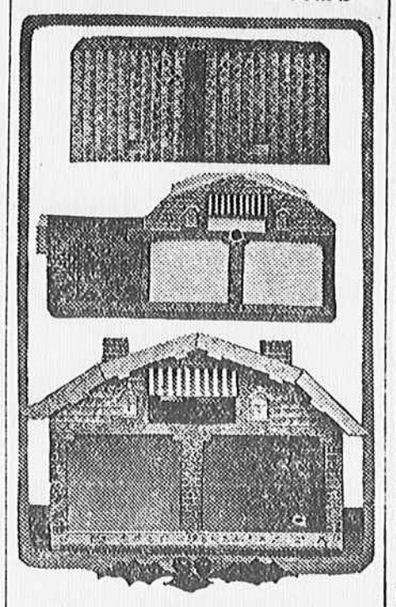
The noted Parisian dressmaker, Worth, owed his early success to the patronage of that famous personage of the third empire, Princess Pauline de Metternich, the wife of the Austrian ambassador to France. By her wit and numerous vagaries of dress and manner she created a sensation at the court of Napoleon III and Eugenie. Therefore it was easy for Worth to become the most sought of the world's dressmakers when the princess approved his styles. Charles Worth, while so long the creator of French fashion, was an Englishman, born in Bourne, England, in 1825, and died in Paris in 1895.—Baltimore Star.

Carbon From Gas.

Engineers have long been trying to discover an economical way of producing carbon from natural gas. Under the methods now in use there is such an enormous waste of gas that the process is too expensive. Harry Beacom of Wilsonburg, Harrison County, W. Va., has been studying this matter scientifically and experimentally for many years, and now he announces that he has found a method whereby he produces a black without any ash and far superior to that made under the older processes, and whereby the waste of gas is almost entirely eliminated.

Acceptable Toys for the Children

Doll's House of Cardboard

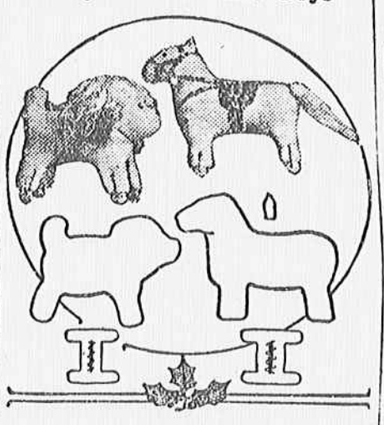


A hat box of strong cardboard and some red, white and green water-color paints are required to make this doll's house. A view of it is given in the picture above, also a picture of the roof and of the front and one side. The roof and chimneys are to be made separately.

Two large, square openings are cut out at the front and above them an oblong is cut on three sides. Bent outward this forms an awning that is painted in red and white stripes. A door is cut in the side and panels and door knobs painted on it. Openings are cut in the roof to hold the chimneys and it is painted in green squares to simulate shingles.

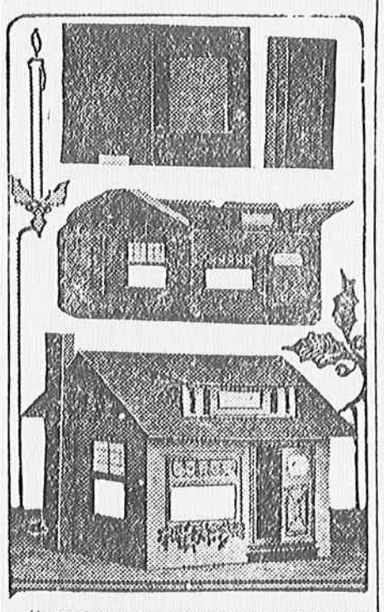
The house and chimneys are painted red lined with white to simulate bricks. White paper pasted over the windows will look like a shade. After the parts are made they are fastened together with paper fasteners.

Easily Made Animal Toys



Animals, that please the little ones, are made of canton flannel or plush, and stuffed with sawdust. Pins with black heads, beads, or regulation artificial eyes are used, and bits of lamb's wool or fur provide the required hair. A dog and pony are pictured here, made of white canton flannel, also outlines of patterns for cutting them. Each animal is made of three pieces: the two sides and a piece to be sewed underneath. This last has a slit in it for turning the figure right side out after the pieces are machine stitched together. After it is stuffed this opening is sewed up. Almost any animal may be made in this way.

Bungalow Made of Cardboard



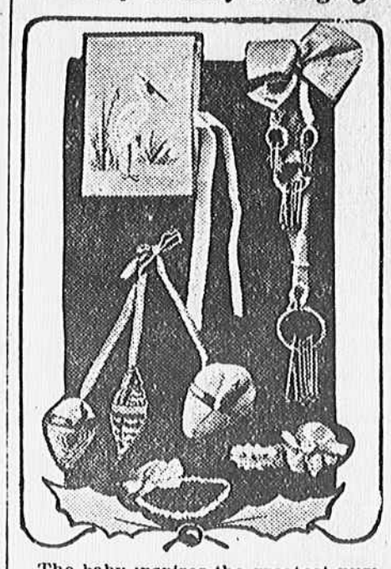
Bungalows and other toy houses are made of heavy cardboard boxes. The picture shows the roof, chimney, front and one side of the bungalow before they are put together, also the finished house.

The windows are cut out and plain white writing paper pasted over the openings on the inside. The window panes and sashes are painted on this. Doors are cut on three sides and panels and knobs painted on them. Doorsteps, window boxes and flowers, shingles, etc., are all painted on the flat surface.

The chimney is made separately, painted red, and lined with white.

Christmas Gifts for the Baby

A Group of Baby Belongings



The baby inspires the greatest number of dainty gifts at Christmas time, nearly all of them the handwork of those who welcome him.

A book in which the important affairs of the new arrival are to be put on record, a hanger for safety pins of several sizes, a pair of armlets, and some brightly colored toys suspended by gay ribbons, are pictured above in the group of baby belongings.

The record book is made by covering cardboard with white moire silk. A stork is painted on the front cover, and plain heavy white paper provides the leaves. Satin ribbon in light blue or pink is sewed to each cover to fasten them together.

Pink satin ribbon and white celluloid rings, in three sizes, are used for the safety-pin hangers. One long and three short ends hang from a pretty bow, each terminating in a ring. The pins are fastened over the rings.

Narrow satin ribbon shirred over flat elastic cord forms the armlets. Each is finished with a full rosette.

Bootees and a Coat Hanger

The warm looking and dainty bootees shown in the picture will be easy to make by those who understand crocheting. They are crocheted of white zephyr and shaped to fit over the knees. A beading is worked in near the top and narrow pink satin ribbon run through it makes it possible to tie the boots so that they will not slip down.

A novel and very pretty touch is given these bootees by the tiny pink rose buds that are embroidered on them with silk floss.

Little wooden hangers are covered with cotton for a padding and over this light satin ribbon is shirred. The hook is wound with the ribbon and the hanger finished with a pretty bow.

Topsy Doll Made of a Stocking

The rag baby has the reputation of being the best beloved of its little owner's possessions. Here is a Topsy doll made of a black stocking with mouth and nose outlined with yarn and glass beads for eyes. By raveling an old knitted mitten or any knitted article, its head of kinky hair is assured.

The figure is cut out in two pieces, which are machine-stitched together, with an opening left at one side for turning it right side out. It is stuffed with cotton. Rompers and a cap of gayly striped gingham add to the fascination of this Topsy.